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SUBJECT: DRC SENATE TO OPEN REGULAR SESSION MARCH 15

¶1. (U) Summary. The DRC Senate closed its special session with completion of a draft internal rules proposal by an ad hoc committee March 10. The text will be submitted for consideration by the full Senate during the regular session beginning March 15. Once approved, it must be certified by the Supreme Court certification before leadership elections can take place. Current speculation for the key post of Senate president focuses on candidates from the center and west of the country. End summary.

¶2. (U) The newly-elected DRC Senate has moved slowly since opening its special session February 3. A twenty-six member ad hoc committee completed a draft internal rules proposal March 10. This will be debated, and amendments considered, by the full Senate during its three-month regular session, which opens March 15. The final text must be certified as constitutional by the Supreme Court, which will have 15 days to rule after receiving it. Once certified, the text will be returned to the Senate for a final vote.

¶3. (U) The Senate can then proceed with election of its officers, a seven-member executive committee ("bureau definitif") consisting of a president, first and second vice presidents, a spokesperson ("rapporteur") and deputy, and an administrative and financial officer ("questeur") and deputy. However, the timetable for approval of Senate rules appears likely to push elections into April. A temporary committee chaired by the oldest senator, Mulendo Mbweshi Konguo, a traditional chief from Western Kasai, and assisted by the two youngest, John Muyamba Ngove of Eastern Kasai and Patrick Thierry Kakwata of Katanga, will continue to lead proceedings until permanent officers are elected.

¶4. (U) There has been a good deal of speculation regarding the Senate presidency, in part because the new Constitution stipulates the eventual winner would succeed President Joseph Kabila in the event he is unable to complete his five-year term. With Kabila's AMP coalition holding a majority of seats, it is unlikely an opposition figure such as Jean-Pierre Bemba would emerge as the Senate's leader.

¶5. (SBU) Prominent names mentioned include: former transitional Vice President Abdoulaye Yerodia; university professor, audit court (Cour des Comptes) president and Mobutu-era prime minister Evariste Mabi Mulumba; former Kabila chief of staff Leonard She Okitundu; and AMP coordinator and former finance minister Andre Philippe Futa. Senate Secretary General (and AMP member) Martine Masika, expressing a view making the rounds in Kinshasa, said March 6 that since both Kabila and National Assembly President Vital Kamerhe are from the east, it would be politic to have a Senate President from the center or west. Mabi (Western Kasai), She Okitunda and Futa (Eastern Kasai) are all from the center, Yerodia (Bas-Congo) is from the west.

¶6. (SBU) Comment. The Senate, in common with other post-Transition institutions, has been slow getting up and running. In principle,

its special session should have lasted only 30 days. Its failure to approve rules and elect officers during the session will set back its timetable for forthcoming legislation, including the crucial budget law, possibly by a significant margin. End comment.

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